

The book cover features a light beige background with several overlapping speech bubbles in various colors: teal, red, green, purple, orange-red, and yellow-orange. The text is arranged within these bubbles.

ISPEAQ

KRISTEN
CARTER

How to Speak Up
for Yourself

and Have Difficult
Conversations

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Contents

To my wonderful family, Charles, Max and Sarah,
who never stop encouraging me
and with whom I feel free to talk about anything.

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Introduction

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The process for speaking up for yourself that I'm sharing in this book is something I created because I desperately wanted it.

I didn't grow up with sparkling examples of how to have a constructive conversation about difficult topics. The lessons I learned by observing my parents included, instead, withdrawing into yourself and feeling hurt and victimized (sometimes for days at a time); being passive-aggressive — like sticking your tongue out at your partner behind their back; slamming kitchen drawers to broadcast your feelings; leaving early for breakfast with friendly colleagues and working very long days rather than being home with your family; and sometimes sharing your frustration with your kids but not with your spouse, which helped rally the kids to "your side."

I remember feeling so frustrated at some of this stuff, as well as being taught to be a good girl and not make a fuss or, god forbid, get angry, that sometimes my thoughts and feelings would explode outward, like emotional projectile vomiting. My mom would say my anger scared her, which made me feel like there was something wrong with me. I have a suspicion that her fear of anger reminded her of some aspect of her childhood, but I don't know for sure. She didn't talk about it.

But here's something my parents and I had in common: we were never taught how to do any better. Their parents also had no guidebook telling them how to have difficult conversations. Neither did theirs. Or theirs. And our schools didn't teach us either.

Fast-forward a few decades, and after a successful career in marketing and corporate communications — finding it MUCH easier to communicate on other people's behalf than on my own — I made a professional move into coaching.

And lo and behold, I discovered that lots of other successful adults had trouble speaking up for themselves, too. Many of my clients were frustrated with a range of things (their marriages, jobs, bosses, rebellious kids, parents or in-laws) but didn't know how to fix them. They were too afraid of conflict and the potential of damaging their relationships to say what they were feeling.

In response to this clear need on behalf of others and myself, I read everything I could find about why we struggle to speak up for ourselves and what we could do about it. I discovered some wonderful ideas from the fields of coaching, psychology, neurology and professional mediation. Then I cobbled those ideas together into a technique I've used myself and taught to my individual clients, companies and even my children. In fact it was my son, Max, who finally convinced me to write this book so I could share ISPEAQ more broadly.

It is my sincere hope that if you struggle to speak up for yourself, you will find some ideas here that will help you feel empowered to open up and say how you really feel, calmly and confidently. You deserve to speak your truth and are worth the effort to learn how to do so.

Kristen Carter

July 2020

Why It's Hard to Speak Up for Yourself and Why You Should Do It Anyway

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George was at the end of his rope. He had moved off campus into an apartment with a nice guy he'd met in the dorm, only to discover that Lee was a horrible roommate. He would leave dirty dishes in the sink and on the stove for days, left his clothes all over the place, often paid his rent late, and got a dog even though they'd agreed not to have pets. George had never been in a situation like this before and his polite hints weren't changing Lee's behavior at all. He was tired of living in a dump and was afraid of blowing up over it someday. The idea of having a shouting match made kind, gentle George extremely uncomfortable.

Maria liked her job as a reporter but was starting to resent her boss, Selene. Selene was a perfectionist and tended to want rewrites of everything Maria turned in, even if the facts were right and Maria considered her stories to be well written. At first, that had just been irritating. Over time, however, there had been staff cuts and now Selene was getting stretched thin and stressed out. Her perfectionism and her direct way of speaking could make her feedback sound incredibly harsh and critical, and recently she had shouted at Maria in front of the whole newsroom. Maria didn't like being micromanaged, let alone shouted at. She wanted to say something about it but rather than risk a nasty confrontation with Selene, she was considering just quitting instead.

Todd had a problem. His rock band was trying to go pro, but despite their best efforts, the guitarist, Baz, was holding them back. Baz was becoming less invested in the band. He frequently skipped practice, didn't learn their new songs and messed up during live shows. Todd wanted to confront Baz but was afraid of damaging their long-standing

friendship. As other people in the industry started to take notice of the band's weakening performance, Todd knew things were going to come to a head: either Baz had to step up his game or Todd was going to have to replace him.

What George, Maria and Todd have in common, besides being my coaching clients, is their desire to speak their minds without having to deal with horrible repercussions like the end of a long friendship, hurting someone's feelings, losing their cool, causing a scene at work or even being fired. They want circumstances to change, but they don't want a fight. And they're not sure how to go about it.

So what did George, Maria and Todd do instead of confronting Lee, Selena and Baz directly? They talked to me. People often do this: talk to sympathetic friends, family, colleagues, a coach or a therapist to vent their frustrations and to get the kind of soothing affirmation that comes from people who care about them.

But doing so doesn't solve the problem.

What DOES solve the problem is speaking to the person we have an issue with, in a way that preserves our and their dignity, and gives us the best chance at bringing about positive change. That's why I developed ISPEAQ, a guided process for having difficult conversations. Each of the people above used it to address their tricky situations and you'll see how it worked for them as you read through these chapters, in the boxes titled, "ISPEAQ in Action."

But first let's talk about why this is so hard for us to do

There are two main reasons we struggle to speak up for ourselves. The first is fear. The second is that we've never been taught.

It makes sense that fear appears when we have to have a difficult conversation. We risk getting flustered, for one thing: forgetting our train

of thought, stammering, sweating, saying something we didn't intend to. This happens when our emotional brains take over from our rational brains. You've probably experienced this before and, if it didn't go well, you might be afraid of it happening again.

We also can't predict — and therefore we fear — the other person's reaction. Depending on the circumstances, they might get defensive, sad, angry, reject us or even tell us to pack up our desks and get out. No wonder it can feel safer to suck it up and keep our mouths shut.

As for never being taught, I'm am not aware of any schools that teach kids how to have difficult conversations. (If you know of any, please let me know!) Likewise, most parents don't — or can't — teach this because they never learned it themselves. In fact, some parents and schools actively discourage children from speaking their minds.

Why it's worth learning to speak up for yourself

So why bother? Why expose yourself to the risks of saying what you really feel? Here are a few reasons:

- You're worth it. Your opinion and needs are just as important as anyone else's.
- You may deepen and strengthen your relationship by showing the other person you care enough to have this difficult conversation.
- Your courage to speak up could mean protecting someone who isn't able to speak up for themselves.
- Not doing so could mean you develop resentment about the situation or person that's upsetting you, and resentment is toxic — to relationships, to your spirit and possibly even to your health.
- You can teach by example if you have children, students or employees who see you doing this effectively.

What is ISPEAQ, and where does it come from?

ISPEAQ is the acronym for a process that breaks down a difficult conversation into several parts that are easy to understand and to prepare for step-by-step.

I created ISPEAQ by drawing on a number of sources in the fields of psychology, neurology and coaching, including:

- Psychologist Marshall Rosenberg and his work in non-violent communications (NVC). NVC assumes that human beings have the capacity for empathy and compassion and proposes ideas for relating with one another constructively.
- Positive Psychology, which emphasizes the inner strengths we all possess. An awareness of these strengths can help build your confidence and also allow you to see and acknowledge the good in the person you are speaking to, which in turn can help them respond positively to you.
- Nancy Kline, whose books, *Time to Think* and *More Time to Think*, describe ideal conditions for holding a respectful conversation.
- Non-verbal communications, or what we convey to others not with words but through facial expression, tone of voice, eye contact, body language, gestures, and special brain cells called “mirror neurons,” which may help others perceive our true intentions. Scientists say that at least 80% of what we communicate is non-verbal!

A brief overview of the process

The next few chapters explain each of these aspects in detail, but here’s a quick introduction.

I = Individual, Intention and “I”-language

- Individual: First you need to be talking to the person with whom

you have the issue. Talking to other people won't make change happen.

- **Intention:** You need to be clear on the intention of your conversation; what are you trying to accomplish by speaking up? You also want to know what your intention is for your relationship with the other person when the conversation's over.
- **"I"-language:** This means speaking from your own point of view, saying things like "I feel," "I need" and "I want." The opposite of this, "you-speak," sounds blame-y and confrontational, like: "You did this," or "You make me feel," or "You hurt me when you..." You-speak puts the other person on the defensive and will diminish your chances of a constructive conversation.

S = Suitable Setting

- Choose a place and time that give you and your listener the best chance for a good conversation.

P = Positivity and Praise

- **Positivity:** Think of the best possible outcome for this conversation and for your relationship with the other person. Be optimistic that the conversation will go well. The other person is likely to pick up on your positive intentions without you even saying a word.
- **Praise:** Tell the other person what you truly appreciate and value about them. This will help put them at ease and also signal your desire to have an even stronger relationship when the conversation is over.

E = Explicit Example

- You'll want to refer to a very specific incident in this conversation, like, "when you left out the orange juice this morning," rather than something general like, "how you always leave out the orange juice." You don't want to get into an argument about whether your observations are true or false, which can happen if your example is sweeping or vague.

A = Adversely Affected

- Know and be able to convey how the other person's behavior adversely affected you. Did it cause you to be late? Frustrated? Embarrassed?

Q = reQuirements and Questions

- What do you require/need going forward?
- Does the other person have any questions?
- What do THEY require?

After the chapters explain these components in more detail, you'll find an ISPEAQ worksheet to help you prepare for your own difficult conversations. Then, I've offered more than a dozen examples of using ISPEAQ in various situations to help get your creative, confident conversational juices flowing. Finally, you'll find several pages where you can make notes in preparation for your conversations. You can also use these pages to reflect on the conversations you do have, how they went and whether you might do anything differently next time. Learning to speak up for yourself and having difficult conversations is something that is likely to take some practice and persistence, but you're worth the effort.



Identify the Individual **Set Intentions** **Use “I” Language**

These “I” activities are done in preparation for your conversation, before you even start to speak.

Identify the Individual you need to talk to

As I mentioned in the introduction, we frequently take our gripes to sympathetic friends and family before — or instead of — addressing the person with whom we have a grievance. This is understandable, but it doesn’t help solve the problem. In fact, it can make it worse; by repeatedly detailing our struggles we can become convinced of our victimhood, build up righteous indignation and become so angry that we can’t speak calmly and rationally.

In order to solve the problem you want to solve, you are going to have to talk to *that one person*. So, who is this person? Identifying them is your very first step.

Set your Intentions

Your Intention for the Relationship

From a big picture point of view, the first thing you’ll want to clarify is what you’d like your relationship with this person to be like *after* the conversation. This whole book and process assume that you want the relationship either to improve or not deteriorate. If you don’t care about

the relationship, go ahead and blow your top and tell that schmuck to take a hike. And save this book for some other time.

If, however, you want to change a situation but you also want to have a good relationship going forward, it helps to be clear about why. You will convey your positive intention not only with your words but with your body language, too.

A thought-prompt for this intention could be: "When we've had this conversation, I would like the two of us to be..." Maybe you want to be:

- Closer
- More comfortable working together
- Aligned on an important goal
- More supportive of each other
- Agreed on the terms of joint custody

The possibilities are endless. The point is to identify this intention because it will shift your energy and your mindset into something productive. It will remind you of your positive feelings toward this person — or at least the potential for a positive resolution of an issue — rather than any negative feelings you might have about something they've done or said (or didn't do or didn't say).

I encourage you to be really honest with yourself here. If you have any negative desire at all, like wanting to retaliate for something you resent or to put someone 'in their place,' they'll know. This won't work. Either wait until you cool off or try again to identify a positive outcome you can commit to.

Your Intention for the Conversation

The second intention you'll want to make is for the outcome of the con-

versation itself. This is more specific than the intention of your relationship. Assuming you want your relationship to stay good or get better, the topic at hand is a specific grievance. What is it? This could be anything from being passed over for a promotion to your partner leaving her dirty clothes on the bathroom floor. What specific change would you like to see as a result of this conversation?

Here's a thought-prompt with some ideas to get you thinking: "When this conversation is over, I hope that..."

- She will put her laundry in the hamper
- He will consider getting professional help
- We will agree to sharing the cooking/cleaning/driving/financial decisions/etc., more fairly
- I will be given total responsibility for the annual report
- I will be promoted or given a raise, or align with my boss on what's needed to get there
- He will forgive me

ISPEAQ in Action: Intention-Setting

George and Lee

Intention for the relationship: Comfortable, mutually responsible co-habitation

Intention for the conversation: Get Lee to clean up after himself

Maria and Selene

Intention for the relationship: Work together professionally, mutual respect

Intention for the conversation: Stop being criticized so openly and so often

Todd and Baz

Intention for the relationship: Protect the life-long friendship

Intention for the conversation: Find out why Baz hasn't been showing up prepared to play and, if he's not committed, talk about him quitting the band

Use "I" Language

Has anybody ever come at you with a sentence that started, "You did this," or "You made me do that," or anything else followed by the word "you?" Do you remember how you reacted? Chances are, you got defensive immediately. Naturally! That's what we do when we feel attacked.

In ISPEAQ, we avoid triggering this reaction by sticking to "I" language, like: "I felt this," "I reacted this way," "I noticed," "I need," "I want," "I believe." The minute we switch into "you" language, we risk making the other person feel threatened, thereby reducing our chances for a calm and productive conversation.

S

Suitable Setting

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Peace. Calm. Quiet. Harmony. Ease. Encouragement. Physical comfort. No interruptions.

These are some of the ideal qualities of a good conversational environment, and you'll want to try and plan for them before you sit down to talk.

When you need to have a meaningful or difficult conversation or to speak with a person you find difficult, the setting can make a big difference. At the very least, try to choose a time when you're both relaxed and a place that's private. The more ideal qualities you can manage, the more likely it is that the other person will be open to what you have to say and the greater your chances of staying calm and getting your point across.

If it's possible and makes sense, you might even want to establish some ground rules for the conversation in advance. Ask the person to leave their phone behind or set it to airplane mode. Meet somewhere you can close the door. Hang a "do not disturb" sign on the door. Agree not to interrupt each other.

Kids, colleagues, pets and phones can be terrible intrusions. Try to limit them as much as you can.

ISPEAQ in Action: Suitable Settings

George and Lee

When they've just got back from kicking the ball around, over a beer.

Maria and Selena

In a quiet, closed-door conference room; any time when they can be uninterrupted for the duration of their chat.

Todd and Baz

Without other band members present, perhaps after practice and without a performance coming up.

P

Positivity and Praise

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After working through your “I” and “S” actions — identifying the individual, setting your intentions, committing to using “I-language” and choosing a suitable setting — “P” is when you first begin to speak to the other person.

Positive Approach

Although ISPEAQ is a conversation tool, it’s important to remember that most of what you communicate is non-verbal. Your words matter, but so does your frame of mind, your facial expression and your body language.

Remembering your positive intentions for your relationship and for the conversation will help enormously. This will help relax your body and your facial features, contribute to a calming tone of voice and even help the look in your eye send a signal of your positivity.

In order to engage someone in a conversation you want to go well, do three things:

1. Remember your positive intentions

Take a moment to reflect on the positive intentions you established for your relationship and the conversation and visualize a win-win outcome. If it helps, do something that relaxes you and puts you in a positive frame of mind, such as taking a few deep breaths, going for a quick walk or listening to calming or inspiring music.

2. Call the person by a name that conveys positive regard

Using someone's name is a good way to get their attention, and since you want this whole thing to be positive, use the name or title that shows respect. This will get the conversation started and inspire goodwill in the other person as well.

3. Express genuine praise for something about the other person

Expressing genuine appreciation is one of the best things you can do to improve relationships and conversations. Identifying something positive about the other person is good for you, too; it will help put you in the right frame of mind for the conversation and remind you that no matter how difficult a person or situation can be, there is almost always something positive to be found if you look hard enough. If you need help with this, check out the list of character strengths starting on page 26.

The best praise is simple, specific, genuine and timely. Recognize something the other person has done or a quality he or she possesses. But don't go on too long or you might seem patronizing or make the other person worry about what's coming next.

ISPEAQ in Action: Positivity and Praise

George

"Lee, one of the things I enjoy about living with you is doing fun things together, like watching soccer and rugby. You're also really easy-going."

Maria

"Selena, I respect you as an editor and think you have a very strong eye for detail."

Todd

"Baz, your friendship is extremely important to me. You're one of the few friends from high school that I'm still close to."

24 Positive Qualities to Give You Ideas

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If you're struggling to think of something positive about the other person, here are 24 character strengths that you can draw from. In positive psychology, these are considered to be the greatest human strengths and you're bound to find something that applies. Both you and the other person have an abundance of some of these and it feels great when someone recognizes them.

Strengths of Wisdom and Knowledge

- Creativity: Thinking or doing things in new ways
- Curiosity: Having a wide-ranging interest in topics and the world
- Love of Learning: Liking to dive deep into subjects that interest you
- Open-mindedness: Seeing things from all sides; not rushing to judgment
- Perspective: A view of the world that makes sense to you and others

Strengths of Courage

- Bravery: Doing hard things, including sticking up for issues and underdogs
- Honesty/Authenticity: Showing up just as you are, without pretense, and speaking the truth
- Persistence: Sticking with things, even when they get difficult
- Zest: Energy and enthusiasm

Strengths of Humanity

- Kindness: Doing nice things for others

- Love: The capacity to forge deep relationships
- Social Intelligence: Knowing what makes other people tick

Strengths of Community

- Fairness: Treating everyone equally, without bias or prejudice
- Leadership: Rallying a group to get things done
- Teamwork: Participating well with others

Strengths of Moderation

- Forgiveness: Not holding a grudge, letting things go
- Modesty: Not thinking you're more important than others
- Prudence: Letting a future goal determine your behavior today
- Self-regulation: Controlling your appetites and impulses

Strengths of Transcendence

- Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence: Seeing the good in nature, people and the world
- Gratitude: Feeling thankful
- Hope: Believing good things are coming and that you can help make them happen
- Humor: Enjoying laughter and the lighter side of life
- Spirituality: Believing in something bigger than yourself

It may help to reflect on which of these strengths you possess, too. You can lean into your strengths of humanity — kindness, love and social intelligence — in particular to make the most of your conversation. If you'd like explore your strengths further, the VIA Institute on Character (www.viacharacter.org) offers a wonderful free assessment.



Explicit Example

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In this part of the conversation, you will describe something specific that you experienced. You will offer an Explicit Example of the thing that upset you, without getting emotionally caught up in it.

Marshall Rosenberg, PhD, founder of the Center for Non-Violent Communications, calls this “observing without evaluating.” Imagine being a completely dispassionate observer, seeing what happened to you as if you were a bird at the window, or Star Trek’s unemotional Vulcan, Mr. Spock, watching the events as they happened but without getting emotional about them.

Sweeping generalizations, which often include words like always, never, everybody and nobody, are toxic to constructive conversations. When you make a broad statement like, “You’re always late,” or “You never appreciate me,” or “Everybody thinks so,” the other person will immediately look for examples to prove you wrong.

In ISPEAQ, we avoid this by giving explicit examples of specific, unarguably-true incidents, like, “When you were 45 minutes late picking me up this afternoon.” If it’s true, the other person may not like hearing about it, but they won’t be able to deny it happened.

To extend the E part of the ISPEAQ acronym a little further, it helps to avoid getting emotional and evaluating (also called judging). If you start

to get upset or angry, you're less likely to have a constructive conversation. And if you evaluate or judge the other person, they're more likely to get defensive.

Here are some examples of how George, Maria and Todd could get this right...or horribly wrong.

ISPEAQ in Action: Explicit Examples

George (right)

"You left your pot of cooked pasta on the stove with leftover food in it three days ago."

George (wrong)

"You always leave your damn dishes everywhere."

Maria (right)

"You criticized the end of my story about Tuesday's protest in front of the whole newsroom this morning."

Maria (wrong)

"You blew up and embarrassed me in front of everybody."

Todd (right)

"You missed practice on Friday." Or, "You didn't know your part of 'Angry Maniacs' during last weekend's show at the Ogden."

Todd: (wrong)

"You blew off practice like always. You obviously don't care about the band anymore." "You screwed up at the show and made us look like idiots."

The more specific and objective you are, the more success you'll have. The other person will be more likely to hear what you say and to keep listening, and less likely to feel attacked. This sets you up nicely for the next part of the conversation: explaining how you were affected by the incident or behaviour you just described.

A

Adversely Affected

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Now it's time to share how you were adversely affected by the explicit example you gave in the last step. What impact did the other person's words or actions have on you?

How much you share about the impact you felt will depend on your relationship with the other person. You might not mind telling your wife that something that happened at work made you feel emasculated, but if you're talking to your boss, you might want to use words like "side-lined" or "disempowered" instead. To soften the impact a little more, say that *part of you* felt this way.

I've provided a list of dozens of words you might use to describe the emotional impact you felt below.

One word you won't find on the list: **angry**. Try to avoid using this word if you can. It tends to trigger defensiveness in the other person and can derail your whole conversation. You might very well feel angry, but try to use a different word instead, like irate, livid or indignant. It really can make a difference.

Here's how George, Maria and Todd might describe how they were adversely affected.

ISPEAQ In Action: Adversely Affected

George

"When you left your pot of cooked pasta on the stove with leftover food three days ago, it made me frustrated and in fact, a little grossed out. It smells, and I needed the pot to make my dinner."

Maria

"When you criticized the end of my protest article in front of the whole newsroom this morning, I felt embarrassed and belittled."

Todd

"When you missed practice on Friday, we couldn't practice the new material or make plans for our upcoming show in Edgewater." "When you didn't know your part of 'Angry Maniacs' during last weekend's show at the Ogden, the song sounded bad and I felt like we looked unprofessional."

Words to express feeling mad

Apoplectic, ballistic, fuming, furious, incensed, indignant, inflamed, infuriated, irate, livid, outraged, rankled, roiled, sore, steamed up, teed off, ticked, upset, wrathful. (Some of these words could also spark defensiveness; if you use them, try to keep calm while you do so.)

Words to express feeling bad

Aggrieved, alienated, baffled, bereft, blocked, confused, crummy, defeated, discontented, discouraged, disgruntled, displeased, dissatisfied, estranged, foiled, forlorn, frustrated, hopeless, hindered, humiliated, ill, ineffectual, inferior, lame, lonely, lousy, miserable, opposed, puzzled, suboptimal, subpar, thwarted, unsatisfactory, worried, wretched.

Words to express feeling sad

Bad, blue, brokenhearted, cast down, crestfallen, dejected, depressed, despondent, disconsolate, doleful, down, downcast, downhearted, forlorn, gloomy, glum, heartbroken, heartsick, heartsore, heavyhearted, inconsolable, joyless, low, low-spirited, melancholy, miserable, mournful, saddened, sorrowful, sorry, unhappy, woeful, wretched.



reQuirements Questions

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Up to this point in the conversation, you've been delivering a one-sided monologue. In the Q phase, you wrap it up by saying what you reQuire going forward and then open the way for a dialogue by asking if the other person has any Questions. Something that works really well is for both of you to know the ISPEAQ process and to take turns with it until you reach a constructive outcome.

First, start by saying what you require going forward.

For example:

ISPEAQ in Action: What You Require

George

"I need to be able to cook my own food and would like a kitchen that doesn't smell bad, especially since it's the first room you pass when you come into the apartment."

Maria

"I don't mind constructive feedback but would like to get it in private and in a way that feels fair and professional."

Todd

"I want the band to continue getting better and to make a good impression on our fans and the venues that hire us."

You can even offer options to help move things in a positive direction. This will show that you have empathy for the other person's situation and are willing to help make things better. Like:

ISPEAQ in Action: Options Going Forward**George**

"After you cook, could you please toss or store the leftovers and put your dishes in the dishwasher?"

Maria

"Maybe we could set up a weekly meeting to talk about my stories and for you to give me private feedback."

Todd

"If Friday night practice sessions don't work for you, give me some options and I'll check with the rest of the guys." "If you don't know a song, let me know before we put it on a performance playlist." "If you're unhappy being in the band for any reason, I'll understand — just let me know. We can always make a plan."

Finally, to bring the other person into the conversation, ask what they require or whether they have any questions. If they also know the ISPEAQ process, you can sit back and be a good listener (see Chapter 9) while they tell you what they've experienced, how they feel and what they need.

Putting it All Together

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Once you understand the components of ISPEAQ, putting them together into a conversation can go pretty quickly.

Here's how simple the conversation can be:

(Person's name from I), I really appreciate *(qualities from P)* about you. I don't know if I've told you that before, but I really mean it.

I also want for us to *(intention for the relationship from I)*.

But when *(explicit example from E)* happened, I felt/experienced *(how you were affected from A)*.

What I really need is *(what you require from Q)*.

What do you think?

Here's how the full conversations we've been building throughout the book could go:

ISPEAQ IN ACTION

George:

"Lee, one of the things I enjoy about living with you is doing fun things together, like watching soccer and rugby. You're also really easy-going. But when you left your pot of cooked pasta on the stove with leftover food in it three days ago, it made me frustrated and in fact, a little grossed out. It smells, and I needed the pot to make my dinner. I need to be able to cook my own food

and would like a kitchen that doesn't smell bad, especially since it's the first room you pass when you come into the apartment. After you cook, could you please toss or store the leftovers and put your dishes in the dishwasher?"

Maria

"Selena, I respect you as an editor and think you have a very strong eye for detail. But when you criticized the end of my protest article in front of the whole newsroom this morning, I felt embarrassed and belittled. I don't mind constructive feedback but would like to get it in private and in a way that feels fair and professional. Could we perhaps set up a weekly meeting to talk about my stories and for you to give me private feedback?"

Todd

"Baz, your friendship is extremely important to me. You're one of the few friends from high school that I'm still close to. But when you didn't know your part of 'Angry Maniacs' during last weekend's show at the Ogden, the song sounded bad and I felt that we looked unprofessional. I want the band to continue getting better and to make a good impression on our fans and the venues that hire us. If you don't know a song, let me know before we put it on a performance playlist. And if you're unhappy being in the band for any reason, I'll understand, just let me know. What are your thoughts?"

If it helps you to stay focused, fill out an ISPEAQ worksheet (page 44) in advance and bring it with you to the conversation. You might feel a little self-conscious doing this, but it will show the other person that you cared enough to think about it and prepare for it.

Ideally, they will respond respectfully to what you say. Then, it will be their turn to speak and your turn to listen. The next chapter talks about how to be a really great listener.

How to Be a Great Listener

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When it's the other person's turn to talk, here are some ways you can ensure they feel seen, safe, soothed and supported. Feel free to share this list with them, too, if you would like to establish some ground rules for the conversation.

I love this concept from the Harvard Business Review: "Good listeners are like trampolines. They are someone you can bounce ideas off of — and rather than absorbing your ideas and energy, they amplify, energize and clarify your thinking. They make you feel better not by merely passively absorbing what you say, but by actively supporting. This lets you gain energy and height, just like someone jumping on a trampoline."

To be a human listening trampoline, do as many of these things as possible:

- Listen with respect and interest.
- Keep your intention for the relationship in mind.
- Eliminate distractions like phones and laptops.
- Keep eye contact but let your eyes and face relax.
- Let your body be relaxed, too: uncross your arms, sit up straight but not rigid; don't fidget.
- Don't interrupt. Let them finish their thoughts. Be patient. Good listeners never hijack the conversation.
- Encourage them to take all the time they need to formulate and express their thoughts. Express your confidence in them.

- When they seem to be done, ask if they have anything else to add, then give them time to think and collect their thoughts. If you can see they're thinking, just be still and wait. We don't often allow silence in conversation, but it can really help someone think.
- When they have said all they want, thank them for their honesty, courage, commitment to the relationship or any other thing you genuinely appreciate.
- If you're curious about something they've said, ask them to elaborate. It might help to summarize what you heard first and check to see if that was what they meant.
- Don't get defensive. Try to stick to facts and not get carried away by your emotions.
- Don't ever try to 'win' a conversation.

Ideally, both of you will feel heard and respected at the end of your conversation.

It Won't Always Work, Despite Your Best Intentions

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No matter how hard you try, how much you care or how thoroughly you prepare, some conversations just won't go the way you hope they will. Things could go badly at any point in the process, from getting interrupted to losing your train of thought. The other person might get upset and storm out. You might end up sitting alone in the space you carefully designed to having a deep and meaningful connection, wondering what the hell happened.

I hope your conversations go beautifully. But if they don't, here are some things you can do next:

- Debrief with yourself. Think about what went wrong and what you might do differently next time. What did you learn? (There are several pages for notes at the end of this book. Use them to capture your thoughts.)
- Stay committed. If this person and this conversation meant enough to you to have gone through this process, you'll come back to them again. Some people and some issues deserve long-term investments.
- Alternatively, be honest with yourself about how much effort you want to put into this relationship or this topic. Sometimes it's good to know when to stop and move on. No one else can decide this for you.

A Few Last Words and My Hope for You

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You matter. Your dreams and feelings matter. Your relationships matter. Your career and your beliefs and your sense of purpose and your desire to have fun all matter. And sometimes you need to have difficult conversations to make them the best they can be.

If you've ever shied away from speaking up for yourself on behalf of these important things, I hope this ISPEAQ process can help you find the courage to do so. I believe in you. You can do it.

If you try ISPEAQ, I'd love to hear about your experience with it. Did it work? Or not? What would you recommend to others who want to speak up for themselves? Did you have a conversation that others might learn from? If so, please share your lessons and ideas in the comments section on www.kcarter.com/ISPEAQ.

An ISPEAQ Worksheet

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Use this template to prepare for your own ISPEAQ conversation. You can make copies of this page or download a free PDF in either U.S. letter or A4 format at www.kcarter.com/ISPEAQ.

I (Remember to use "I" language)	Who is the individual I need to talk to?
	What is my intention for the relationship once the conversation ends?
	What is my intention for this conversation ?
S	What setting would be suitable for this conversation?
P	What positive quality or strength do I appreciate about this person?
E	What explicit example can I give of the thing that bothered me?
A	How was I adversely affected when that happened?
Q	What do I require going forward?
	Does the other person have any questions ?

Sample Scripts

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The following sample scripts are designed to give you ideas for your own difficult conversations. I am sure they are not exactly the way you'd word things but that's okay! Use them as a springboard for your own leaps into this type of communicating. If it helps, practice with a friend before you dive into the real thing. I've covered a range of topics but there are endless other ones; if you have ideas, please drop me a personal note at kristen@kcarter.com or post it on <http://www.kcarter.com/ISPEAQ>.

Scenario

Your father is pressuring you to major in business, but you hate the idea.

I	Individual	Dad
	Intention for the relationship	Mutual respect; and I want to be treated more like an adult than a child
	Intention for the conversation	To be able to choose my own major
S	Suitable setting	After dinner when everybody else is busy somewhere
P	Positive quality I appreciate	He cares about me and my future and wants me to be financially secure
E	Explicit example	When he said yesterday that a business degree is the only way to guarantee future success
A	How was I adversely affected?	I got a knot in my stomach, felt like I had no options and that my own dreams and desires don't matter
Q	What do I require going forward?	The opportunity to explore my options without feeling pressured into something I don't want

Putting it all together

Dad, I know you care about my future and want me to be financially secure on my own someday. But when you said yesterday that a business degree is the only way to guarantee future success, I got a knot in my stomach and was worried that

I won't be able to follow my own dreams. I'd really like the opportunity to explore my options without feeling pressured into something I don't want. What would you think if I took a range of general studies courses my first year, which could apply toward any major, and then talked to you about what I'm feeling drawn toward?

Scenario

Your brother-in-law has very different political views and seems to talk about them non-stop. You're at a family dinner and it sounds like he's about to get started again.

I	Individual	Jim
	Intention for the relationship	Cordial relations; respect for each other's views
	Intention for the conversation	Less political talk at family gatherings; stop him from monopolizing the conversation
S	Suitable setting	When he seems to be headed toward politics; while I still feel calm and cool-headed
P	Positive quality I appreciate	His sense of conviction; he's a good father and husband
E	Explicit example	When he talked at length about his political views the last time we were all together
A	How was I adversely affected?	I felt like my opinions were disregarded and disrespected; after a while I just switched off
Q	What do I require going forward?	The chance to share my own views without being told I'm wrong; the chance to talk about other things

Putting it all together

Jim, I hope you know I think you're a decent guy and a good family man. You're also a man of your convictions, which I respect.

But when you talked about your political views the last time we were together, I felt like my own opinions were disregarded and disrespected. It also didn't give us all the chance to talk about much else. I can't speak for anyone else, but I'd personally like to share my own views without being told I'm wrong, or to talk about other things like how Alex is doing in school or mom's trip to visit Sam and the kids.

Scenario

You didn't get the promotion you were hoping for.

I	Individual	My boss, Kamal
	Intention for the relationship	A respectful working relationship
	Intention for the conversation	Find out why I didn't get the promotion; clarify the criteria for advancement so I can keep trying
S	Suitable setting	A conference room with the door closed
P	Positive quality I appreciate	He's a good leader and really knows this business
E	Explicit example	Not being promoted
A	How was I adversely affected?	I felt disappointed and frustrated, and didn't understand why I didn't get it
Q	What do I require going forward?	To know I have potential for advancement with the company; to know the criteria for promotion

Putting it all together

Kamal, thanks for meeting with me. I wanted to ask for your insight because you're a good leader and you really know the business. When Jenny got the promotion to team leader, I felt disappointed and frustrated. I thought I had what I needed to get the job and was hoping you could tell me whether you think I have potential for advancement with the company and, if so, what the specific criteria are so I can work toward promotion one day.

Scenario

Joe from work keeps making suggestive remarks and getting too close to you physically. You want him to stop.

I	Individual	Joe
	Intention for the relationship	Professional, nothing more
	Intention for the conversation	To get Joe to stop doing things that make me uncomfortable
S	Suitable setting	The moment he starts again, or when we get a moment alone
P	Positive quality I appreciate	He's upbeat and friendly
E	Explicit example	When he put his arm over the back of my chair and said, "Gee your hair smells good"
A	How was I adversely affected?	I felt very uncomfortable, got tense, and moved my head away
Q	What do I require going forward?	Strictly professional relationships with him and with all my colleagues

Putting it all together

Joe, you're a very friendly guy and it's possible that I might have misinterpreted something you did. When you leaned over my chair the other day and said my hair smelled good, it made me uncomfortable and made me tense up. I respect you as a colleague and just want to say that I want to have a purely professional relationship with you like I do with everyone else here at work.

Scenario

Your 14-year-old daughter is losing weight, exercising a lot and not eating foods she used to enjoy. You're worried this could signal an eating disorder.

I	Individual	Julia
	Intention for the relationship	Open communication, closeness, making sure she knows I love and support her
	Intention for the conversation	To convey my concerns, open the conversation about this subject, and make sure she knows I'm her ally
S	Suitable setting	When we're home alone together, on a park bench — somewhere neutral
P	Positive quality I appreciate	I love so many things about her! But I think I must be careful not to mention anything that focuses on her appearance; I'll refer to some of her strengths instead
E	Explicit example	When she ate just broccoli for dinner last night; tonight she pushed her food around but didn't eat most of it
A	How was I adversely affected?	I'm concerned about her health; I feel scared that she is denying herself nutritious food and sad that she won't eat 'fun foods' that she used to enjoy, like Jo's birthday cake; I'm also afraid this could get worse
Q	What do I require going forward?	Open dialogue with her; a team/partner approach to getting her the help she needs

Putting it all together

Julia, honey, you know how much I love you. You've always had such a happy and energetic spark and I adore your curiosity and kindness. But I'm also beginning to worry about something. Last night you just ate broccoli for dinner and tonight you pushed your food around without eating much of it. I'm concerned that your relationship with food is changing and wonder what that's about. I care about your health and wellbeing more than anything, and if there's anything troubling you I want you to know I'm here to support you through it and to get any support you might need.

Author's note: Eating disorders are serious business. The National Eating Disorders Association (www.nationaleatingdisorders.org) offers a variety of resources; you may also want to talk to your pediatrician or a therapist who specializes in eating disorders.

Scenario

Your mother-in-law rearranges your kitchen cabinets when she comes to visit. She lives out of state and doesn't visit often, but she's coming this summer and you'd like to say something about it — and stop it from happening — this time.

I	Individual	Louise
	Intention for the relationship	Mutual respect; to be treated like the grown woman I am — more of a fellow adult than a child
	Intention for the conversation	To get her to leave my cabinets the way they are, in a way that doesn't cause lasting friction
S	Suitable setting	After she's had a chance to settle in, maybe over a cup of coffee
P	Positive quality I appreciate	She has lots of housekeeping experience; she's organized; she loves the kids; she's an amazing cook; she's willing to help out
E	Explicit example	Last time she was here she moved all the cooking and baking pans and 'organized' my spices in such a way that I couldn't find things after she left
A	How was I adversely affected?	I got very tense; I let my kitchen be upended, which took time to fix; I felt undermined and disrespected
Q	What do I require going forward?	To have my kitchen stay the way it is; to know where things are; to be treated like an adult

Putting it all together

Louise, it's so great to have you back again. Bob and the kids love spending time with you and I just love that we get to be an extended family for a while. I do have a favor I want to ask, though. You're incredibly helpful and a great organizer, but last time you were here and reorganized my pans and spices, I really struggled to find things for a while. I wound up putting them back the way I had them, which really works for me. I have my own system, you know? If you want to cook and have any trouble finding things, I'd be happy to grab whatever you need. And maybe you could help me rearrange the boys' room; they've outgrown so many of their clothes and toys and I know you and I could whip it into shape.

Scenario

You want to set up a will, but your wife is resistant. Now that you have a child and own your condo, you feel like it's time to do this.

I	Individual	Anya
	Intention for the relationship	Deep love and respect forever
	Intention for the conversation	To get agreement on beginning to set up a will
S	Suitable setting	At Romano's for lunch — after we eat I can show her the paperwork I've downloaded that shows how simple it can be
P	Positive quality I appreciate	She's full of life, a great partner and a great mom
E	Explicit example	Last time I brought up doing a will she said it makes her think of dying and she doesn't want to talk about it
A	How was I adversely affected?	I was not really surprised but disappointed; I worry about what would happen financially if something happened to one or — God forbid — both of us
Q	What do I require going forward?	I want to do the right things even if they are a little emotional and complicated; it would make dealing with "the worst" so much easier for whoever's left behind

Putting it all together

Anya, you know I love you truly, madly, deeply. I know we'll be together as long as we live and that makes me so happy. And I hope that's decades and decades of time. But I also know that sometimes crazy things happen, like COVID. I want us to be prepared in case of the unlikely event that something happens to you or to me. I think of it as a really thoughtful, forward thinking thing, like setting up a savings account for Oscar's college education. It's grown up. And I've found a way to do it that seems as painless as possible, especially since I know this topic makes you uncomfortable. Can you give me just ten minutes to share what I've found that seems like an easy way to do this?

Scenario

Your teenage son keeps disregarding curfew, his grades are dropping and he spends more time than you think he should playing online games. You also get a bad feeling about some of the kids he's been hanging out with.

I recommend trying to stick to one concern per conversation. Trying to talk about all these worries at once is likely to exhaust and overwhelm both you and your son. Instead, try to achieve some success in one area and then build on that in future conversations.

I	Individual	Ken
	Intention for the relationship	Mutual respect; I want him to know I care about his well-being but also want to remind him that he is still a minor living at home and I'm the parent
	Intention for the conversation	To understand why he's been coming home late; get him to agree to his curfew
S	Suitable setting	When I pick him up from school, either in the car or when we get home; when we're both calm; maybe when he comes to the kitchen for a snack
P	Positive quality I appreciate	He's intelligent; his sense of humor, though I don't see it much lately
E	Explicit example	He came home an hour and a half late on Saturday night

A	How was I adversely affected?	I worry; I fear that he is drinking or doing drugs
Q	What do I require going forward?	I want him to respect our house rules and to ensure he's as safe as I possibly can

Putting it all together

Ken, I want to talk to you about something important. You're my son and I love you and want the best for you, now and in the future. Because of that, I'm worried about the fact that you've disrespected our agreed curfew a few times, like coming home at 12:30 instead of 11 on Saturday night. We have house rules for a reason, primarily to make sure you kids are safe and get enough sleep. When you come home late, I worry that you've been in an accident or are doing something that might not be good for you. From my side I'd like to reestablish an agreement about what time you come home at night. What are your thoughts?

Scenario

Your sister thinks you should lose weight. She makes subtle and not-so-subtle comments about it almost every time you see her, including last Tuesday, when she said how nice it would be if the two of you could shop at the same stores. You've tried not to let it bother you, and you know it says more about her than it does about you, but you've had enough.

I	Individual	Alia
	Intention for the relationship	Love, she's my sister; but I'd like more sensitivity and respect from her
	Intention for the conversation	I want to tell her that her comments hurt my feelings; maybe the fact that I've been so easy-going about it makes her think I'm not picking up on her 'hints'
S	Suitable setting	I think I could do this over the phone, otherwise I'll talk to her next time we get together; if it doesn't come up naturally, I could wait until she makes another comment about my weight; if I'm prepared, I'll be able to stay calm while I tell her how I feel
P	Positive quality I appreciate	She means well; she loves me
E	Explicit example	When she said she wished we could shop at the same stores
A	How was I adversely affected?	I felt embarrassed; I find it unbelievable that people think my weight is their business OR a fair topic; I resented her; and it makes me worry about the next time it will happen

Q	What do I require going forward?	Her support; her belief in me; to deal with my weight and my health in my own way; to get together without worrying that I'll be insulted, openly or passively
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Putting it all together

Alia, I love you and I know you mean well, but your comments about my weight hurt my feelings. Even when you hint at it, like when you said you wished we could shop at the same stores, I feel embarrassed and even resentful. It hurts especially because you're one of my closest friends, too. In the future I'd love to get together without worrying that you'll mention my weight. There are so many other things we can talk about! What do you say?

Scenario

You are worried about your wife, Sonya. You've always known her to be upbeat and energetic, but lately she's been tired and unhappy and doesn't seem to enjoy the things she used to do. She seems to be going through the motions with you and the kids and doesn't even seem to enjoy work much anymore, although she has always loved being a teacher.

I	Individual	Sonya
	Intention for the relationship	I love her and I'm in it for the long-haul, no matter what
	Intention for the conversation	Convey my concerns, tell her I'm 100% supportive of her, ask if she's concerned too, and encourage her to talk to her doctor or someone else who can help us figure out what's going on
S	Suitable setting	When the kids are busy and we're alone; she is tired so often that I could mention that first and then tell her my concerns
P	Positive quality I appreciate	She's so supportive of everyone — me and the kids, her colleagues, her dad and sister; and she used to be full of life and energy, curious about everything
E	Explicit example	She didn't want to go on a bike ride with the kids this weekend, which she always used to love; she said last night that work feels draining
A	How was I adversely affected?	I'm worried; I'm also sad for her; I miss the old, zesty Sonya and I bet she does, too

Q	What do I require going forward?	I want to know how she feels and whether she's noticed the changes I have; I'd love it if she'd see the doctor in case it's something physical; if not, let's find out what else it could be and get support
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Putting it all together

Sonya, darling, I love you and always will. And I admire the way you always want to show up 100% for me and the kids and your dad and your sister. But I've been noticing for a while that you haven't had the energy you usually do and that you don't seem as interested in the things you used to enjoy so much, like riding bikes with the kids, and that you said work seems draining. I'm honestly worried. Have you noticed these things too? Do they worry you? I was thinking it might be a good idea to see Dr. Moore for a check-up to make sure it isn't something physical. If it isn't, she could probably recommend some other ideas.

Author's Note: If you or someone you love feels depressed, get help. There are so many ways to get support for mental suffering or illness. It's common, it's not your fault, and it is treatable. In the U.S., the Department of Health and Human Services website offers a wealth of information and links to various kinds of support: <http://www.samhsa.gov/>

Scenario

You really like Julio and think things could get serious, but the sex is a little blah. You want to tell him what makes you feel good but feel awkward about it. Your ex was a great lover and you never had to tell him anything, but he wasn't life-partner material. You don't have anything specific to complain about with Julio's lovemaking, you just want to enjoy it more.

I	Individual	Julio
	Intention for the relationship	I'd like us to get closer, stay together and have better sex
	Intention for the conversation	I want to find a way to tell him or maybe even show him what I want without criticizing; ideally it would be fun and intimate and bring us closer
S	Suitable setting	I don't want to bring it up out of the blue; maybe during foreplay? Or I could say something during sex, if it felt like the right time
P	Positive quality I appreciate	I like so many things about him — he's interesting, has a great sense of humor, is easy to talk to, and we share a lot of the same values
E	Explicit example	Last time we had sex, it just felt a little boring and formulaic
A	How was I adversely affected?	I didn't hate it but didn't love it either
Q	What do I require going forward?	I'd love him to take his time during foreplay, touch me <i>*there*</i> or <i>*that way*</i> and maybe try <i>*something new*</i> sometimes

Putting it all together

Here are some options:

Ooh, I like that – please keep doing it.

Do you mind if I try *this?*

I'd love it if you'd *do this*

I think sex can be so fun and want us to really enjoy it.

Is there anything you'd like to try?

I read about something I'd love to try. Are you open to it?

* Trying to keep the book PG!

If you get a negative response to any of these, that might tell you something about your prospects for great sex with Julio. But chances are he'll appreciate your attempts to make it more fun.

Expressing ourselves about sex doesn't have to be uncomfortable or embarrassing. In fact, it's an opportunity to learn more about each other and grow closer. If it helps, find a book or video you can share with your partner if you really are too shy to talk about it.

Scenario

As a Black woman, you enjoy wearing your hair in a variety of styles. Sometimes it's natural and curly and other times it may be braided in cornrows. Your white colleague, though, frequently comments on your hairstyles and even asks if she can touch your hair. You've kindly laughed it off in the past but you would really like her to stop asking.

I	Individual	Kathryn
	Intention for the relationship	A cordial, professional working relationship
	Intention for the conversation	Get her to stop asking to touch my hair
S	Suitable setting	I can either take her aside privately or be prepared with what to say next time she asks
P	Positive quality I appreciate	She's responsible, a hard worker, generous (she volunteers a lot) and curious
E	Explicit example	Last Monday when I came in with new braids
A	How was I adversely affected?	I felt like an oddity, like there is something strange about me; I also felt like my personal space was being invaded
Q	What do I require going forward?	Not to be asked if she can touch my hair

Putting it all together

Kathryn, I love your curiosity and you're a nice colleague, but I've got to tell you: when you ask to touch my hair it makes me feel uncomfortable and like I'm odd or strange somehow. My hair is part of my personal space and I'd really prefer if you didn't ask to touch it. If you like my hairstyle, I'm open to compliments, though!

Seven states (as of September 2020) have made it illegal for employers to discriminate against employees because of the way they wear their Black hair, whether it's worn naturally or in what are called 'protective styles' like braids, locs and knots. The struggle is real. For more information or to lend your support, look up The Crown Act (CROWN is short for "Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair) at www.thecrownact.com.

Scenario

Your white friend recently shared an article about a Black Lives Matter protest on Facebook that received a number of responses, some of them very racist and derogatory. As a person of color, you're offended by those comments but even more upset by the fact that your friend didn't say anything about them.

I	Individual	Melissa
	Intention for the relationship	Maintain and preserve our long-term friendship
	Intention for the conversation	Let her know it bothers me that she allowed those offensive comments to go unchallenged
S	Suitable setting	At the coffee shop where we usually meet after dropping the kids at school
P	Positive quality I appreciate	She has a beautiful heart; I've always thought of her as loyal in the past; she's a really reliable friend
E	Explicit example	When she shared the post on Facebook and stayed silent to those racist comments
A	How was I adversely affected?	I was shocked about the comments and hurt that she didn't say anything to challenge them
Q	What do I require going forward?	I would like her to stand up against racism, like I would do for her if our roles were reversed

Putting it all together

Melissa, I want to talk about something sensitive for a minute. I love our friendship and have always thought of you as a beautiful person and you've always been there for me. But last week, you posted an article online about the racial protests that garnered a lot of different responses. It's not posting the article that bothers me, but the fact that you didn't challenge the several racist replies some people made. I know you aren't responsible for what other people say, but I was hurt that you stayed silent about the comments. If our friendship is as valuable to you as it is to me, I would hope you'd push back when people say things that are obviously racist and hurtful. Can you see where I'm coming from? I'd love to know what you think.

Scenario

Your daughter Maya recently took an aptitude test at school to see which math class she should be placed in. Although she scored higher than her friend Chrissy, Chrissy was placed in a higher class than Maya. Her teacher has previously said she thinks your daughter struggles with math, and you believe she may have influenced which class your daughter was placed in. You want your daughter to be given a fair placement and supported to learn, rather than dismissed as 'bad at math.' You're worried that this could have a negative impact on Maya's attitude and behavior toward school in general.

I	Individual	Mrs. Waters
	Intention for the relationship	I'd like to maintain (or cultivate) fair and open conversations with her and have her treat Maya with more respect and optimism
	Intention for the conversation	To challenge Maya's placement in the lower math class and share my concerns about the impact her words are having on Maya's attitude toward school and on her self-confidence in general
S	Suitable setting	I'll make an appointment to see her after school
P	Positive quality I appreciate	She has been teaching a long time and is dedicated to her profession
E	Explicit example	The comment on Maya's last report card say she is "demonstrating a low capacity to learn math" and Maya's placement in a lower math class than Chrissy, even though her score was higher

A	How was I adversely affected?	I feel like she views my child as less capable and less worthy, and that she is making Maya feel this way, too
Q	What do I require going forward?	I want her to see Maya as being full of potential, rather than deficient in some way; I also want to understand exactly what she means by her comments and to know what happened with the class placement

Putting it all together

Mrs. Waters, I'm here to talk to you about Maya; particularly about the math class she's been placed in. I appreciate that you're an experienced teacher, but I fear that there are a couple of issues that may be working against my child. The first is your comment that she is "demonstrating a low capacity to learn math," plus her placement in the lower-skills math class. Please will you help me understand your comments and her class placement? I believe Maya has tons of potential and would rather see her challenged and supported. I'm also happy to meet more frequently if it would help and so that we can work on this together.

Scenario

You and Jackson have been dating for two years and you've begun to realize that your relationship just isn't what you want for the long haul. He is a good guy, but not the person you want to spend the rest of your life with. You don't have the same social interests and he can sometimes be moody and withdrawn. You think it's better to end things now so you can both move on and find other, more suitable, partners.

I	Individual	Jackson
	Intention for the relationship	To end it, but to do so with as little pain as possible for both of us
	Intention for the conversation	Tell him how I'm feeling and that I intend to move out
S	Suitable setting	When we're home alone, with the TV off and the phones in the other room; no distractions.
P	Positive quality I appreciate	He's smart, principled, good with money and kind to his parents
E	Explicit example	Last weekend was a pretty good example; he sulked when we went to Barb and Jen's for dinner and then wanted to stay home Sunday, even though we'd made plans to go hiking and to the farmer's market
A	How was I adversely affected?	I felt embarrassed and irritated with him at the dinner, and just didn't feel like a couple; I feel like our plans are dependent on his moods, and that makes me resentful

Q	What do I require going forward?	I want to be happy and social and spontaneous and to feel joyfully connected to the person I'm with; I know relationships aren't fun every minute, but I want more minutes that are fun; I want a partner who brings more lightness and happiness into my life than Jackson does
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Putting it all together

Jackson, I need to talk to you. The first thing I want to say is how much I appreciate certain things about you, like your intelligence, your principles, your financial smarts and how kind you are to your parents. But increasingly I'm just not feeling positive about us as a couple. There are instances like Friday night at Barb and Jen's, when they made a lovely meal for us and you didn't talk during dinner, which was awkward for me and for them. And then on Sunday we had made fun plans, but you didn't feel like doing them so we didn't. I know these are just examples, but for me they represent a broader pattern, one in which I feel disconnected from you and that our plans are dependent on how you feel. I care about you and respect you but feel like I want and need to move on. I think there is someone better suited for both of us out there somewhere. Don't you?

A Note On Conducting Performance Reviews

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Performance reviews are often difficult and can stress out both the giver and the receiver. I can relate; I was a manager and had to do them myself, and was the recipient of dozens of them over the years. The reason I haven't included a sample conversation on work performance is because it doesn't fit the ISPEAQ model exactly. I do have a recommendation on how they should be done, though, which is something like this:

- Start with a similar approach as in ISPEAQ, where you set your intention for the relationship and the conversation and think of the things you admire and appreciate about the person. This will help calm you, put you in the right headspace and allow your body language to broadcast your positive intentions.
- Tell the person how valuable they are to your team and the company.
- This next part is what might seem out of order to you. While conventional wisdom and the ISPEAQ model say to talk about strengths first and *then* address problem areas, I suggest flipping this around. The employee is, probably, worried that criticism or bad news is coming, so their brain is in fear/survival mode. In this state, they may not even hear the positive things you say. Talking about their positive work at this point may seem like you're patronizing them, delaying the inevitable and trying to soften the blow.
- Instead, say, "Let's get the areas for improvement out of the way first. You probably know what some of them are anyway, so let's talk about those." Offer specific examples; don't generalize. Ap-

proach this as a conversation instead of a scolding.

- Then, once that uncomfortable bit is over for both of you, build for the future. Tell them you know they have the inner and outer resources to make the improvements you've just talked about. Get specific. Know their unique strengths and skills and tell them, for example, how their persistence will help issue 1, or their curiosity will help them with issue 2, or that you can assist them to organize training to deal with issue 3. Build up their belief in themselves and show them that you not only believe in them but can see specific ways they can move ahead.

Doing it this way will help you both leave the review feeling positive and connected. Your employee will feel that while you've been honest about their faults (they know they aren't perfect), they have a manager who believes in them and even sees the strengths and skills they bring to the party.

If you try this, I'd love to know how it works. Again, my email address is kristen@kcarter.com or you can share your comments with the community at www.kcarter.com/ISPEAQ.

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This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

Blank lined paper with horizontal ruling lines.

Blank lined paper with horizontal ruling lines.

Blank lined paper with horizontal ruling lines.

Resources

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Here are the resources mentioned in this book, as well as places you might look for more information.

Non-Violent Communications

The Center for Non-Violent Communications (www.cnvc.org) is a one-stop resource for books, classes, workshops and training programs.

Strengths and Positive Psychology

For the VIA Assessment of Character Strengths, go to www.viacharacter.org.

A great general, introductory book about strengths is *The Power of Character Strengths: Appreciate and Ignite Your Positive Personality*, by Ryan Niemiec and Robert McGrath. (2019, VIA Institute on Character.)

For a broader look at positive psychology, I recommend *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*, by Martin Seligman, PhD. (2012, Atria Books.)

Creating a safe and supportive space for meaningful conversations

Time to Think: Listening to Ignite the Human Mind and *More Time to Think: The Power of Independent Thinking*, both by Nancy Kline, are wonderful books on this subject. (Both re-released in 2015, Cassell publishing.)

Personal empowerment and healing

The Instinct to Heal, by Dr. David Servan-Schreiber, describes seven natural approaches to curing depression, anxiety and stress without drugs and without talk therapy. There's a section on having difficult conversations that describes a simpler variation of ISPEAQ as well as a template for a different kind of difficult conversation: supporting someone who's struggling without getting entangled in their drama. I've written about

this at www.kcarter.com/2020/05/06/how-to-help-someone-cope/

Harvard Business Review

The article mentioned in Chapter 9 is “How to Be a Great Listener” and can be found online at www.hbr.org/2016/07/what-great-listeners-actually-do.

More information and resources related to ISPEAQ

Download a PDF version of the ISPEAQ worksheet and join the conversation about speaking up for yourself on my website, www.kcarter.com/ISPEAQ.

Acknowledgments

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About the Author

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Kristen Carter is a writer and coach certified in positive psychology, family coaching, the Enneagram and life coaching. She has been in private practice since 2009, first in Johannesburg, South Africa, and now in the mountains west of Boulder, Colorado. Her website is www.kcarter.com.

ISPEAQ

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Quantity sales. Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by corporations, associations, schools and others. For details, contact Kristen Carter, kristen@kcarter.com.

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Have you ever wished you could say what you were really thinking, without jeopardizing an important relationship?

Is there a bully at work, school, or in your personal life that you'd love to stand up to, but you aren't sure what to say?

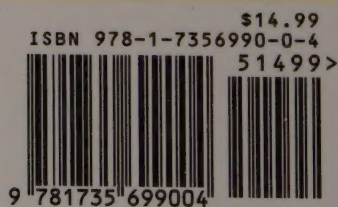
Do you get uncomfortable, emotional, or nervous at the idea of talking to a certain person?

There is a better way to have difficult conversations; certified coach and communications expert Kristen Carter shows you how.

In this simple yet powerful book, Kristen provides a clear step-by-step process that will help you work through any conversation. If you need a starting point, there are also sample scripts related to having difficult conversations with anyone from your politically-opinionated relative to a ho-hum lover to your critical boss.

Kristen's unique method, ISPEAQ, will help you feel prepared and empowered to speak up for yourself like never before. Clients have called the ISPEAQ method "life-changing," "simple but powerful," and "the best tool our team has ever learned."

Your voice and your feelings matter. Here's how to get them out of your head and share them with the world, calmly and confidently.



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